

H.B. Roe

BICENTENARY SERMONS.

TWO SERMONS

ON THE

History and Scriptural Authority

OF THE

BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER;

PREACHED IN ST. MATTHEW'S FREE CHAPEL, QUEBEC,
ON ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S DAY, 1862.

BY THE

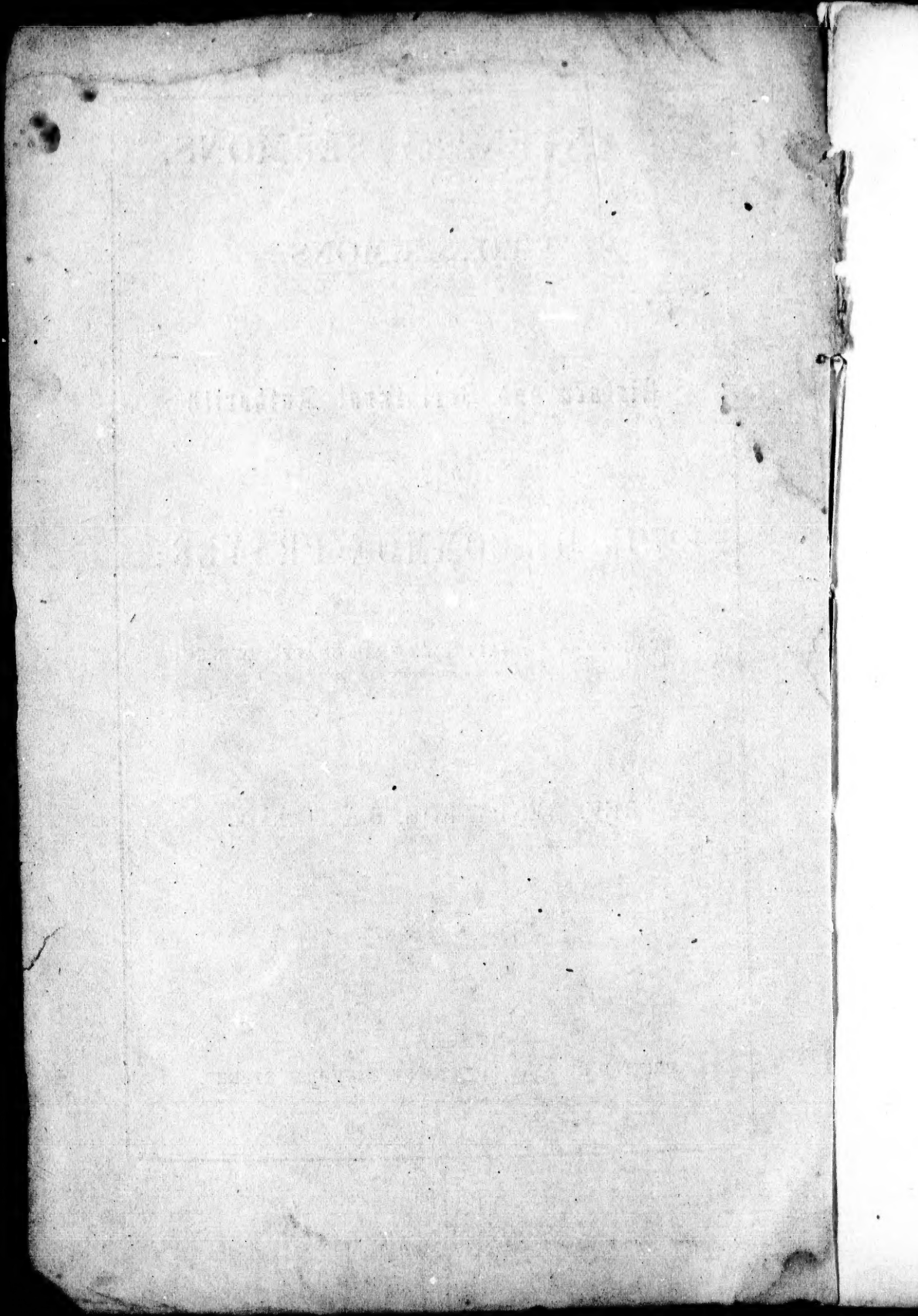
REV. HENRY ROE, B.A., CURATE.

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RESOLUTION *adopted by the Synod of the Diocese of
Quebec, 3rd July, 1862 :*

Moved by Rev. H. ROE, seconded by Mr. W. G.
WURTELE, and Resolved,—

That, in accordance with that part of his Lordship's charge which referred to the Bicentenary anniversary of the withdrawing of certain nonconformist ministers from the Church of England, it be recommended to the Clergy to observe that day by preaching upon the history and excellence and scriptural authority of the Book of Common Prayer.

BICENTENARY SERMON.

I.

"Walk about Zion, and go round about her ;
Tell the towers thereof:
Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces ;
That ye may tell it to the generation following."

Ps. xlviii. 12, 13.

I announced to you last Sunday, Brethren, that our Diocesan Synod, at its last Session, adopted a Resolution recommending the Clergy of the Diocese to "observe this day by preaching upon the history and excellence and Scriptural authority of the Book of Common Prayer."

On this day, the Feast of St. Bartholomew, two hundred years ago, the English Prayer Book was set forth as it stands now. In its present form, therefore, our Prayer Book is just two hundred years old ; although the same book, substantially, with very trifling and unimportant differences, was used in our Church for more than one hundred years before.

And as we to-day look back and review the history of the English Church for those three hundred years, what cause have we not to bless God for giving and preserving to our use our Book of Common Prayer! That precious book, and the holy and blessed English Bible, which is inseparable from it, and which is read, by its directions, in the ears of the people, through and through in their mother tongue, day by day every year;—that book, under God's blessing, has made the English nation what it is at this day—the salt of the earth and the hope of the world. Thank God for our Book of Common Prayer!

It is my duty to-day, as instructed by the Synod, to give you a brief history of the Prayer Book. And as in doing so I must necessarily crowd a great deal of matter into a short space of time, I must beg, my brethren, your most careful attention.

1. Now, in the first place, let me ask you to think for a moment what a Book of Common Prayer is. It is, is it not, a form set forth by authority, for the common public worship of Almighty God. It is plain that if a number of persons are to come together, from time to time, to worship God, they must agree together beforehand to conduct their worship on some plan, or else there would be confusion. There must be, then, it would seem, some form, or plan, or mode, well known and agreed upon beforehand, if people are to come together for public worship. And so we find it always has been all the world over, both among Christian and heathen nations; and so it is among

all Christians everywhere now. Not only among us, but among all Christian bodies, when they come together, every one knows beforehand the way in which the worship of God is to be conducted, what is to come first, and what next, all through the service. All have forms of some kind: to cry out then against forms is foolish, for all have and use them.

And so it always was. But, mark this, the substance, the principal parts of God's public worship, have always been prescribed, appointed beforehand by God Himself. Under the Old Testament it was at first *sacrifices*; then sacrifices and prayers and thanksgivings; then came in the Mosaic worship, sacrifices being still the substance, the heart and soul of the worship; then the Psalms were gradually written, and introduced with music into public worship. And this brings us down to New Testament times,—to the setting up of the Kingdom of Christ, the institution of His Church.

Our blessed Saviour before he went away instituted public worship in His Church. He did so when He promised to be always present to the end of the world, wherever two or three were gathered together in His name, having agreed beforehand what they would ask. And He did more. He gave the Lord's Prayer for public use; and He instituted the Holy Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, and bade Christians *Do this in remembrance of Him*. And as animal sacrifices were the substance and heart of God's worship under the Old Testament, so in Christian times the heart and substance

of Christian worship are the Lord's Supper and the Lord's Prayer.

I cannot stay to trace out this morning for you, the many undesigned intimations and hints we have scattered over the Acts and Epistles, that the very first Christians had a regular form of worship of some sort. I will only remind you that in the very beginning of the Acts* we are told that the first Christians continued steadfastly attending upon the Apostles' teaching, and also steadfast in contributing to the Church's fund for the relief of the poor, and steadfast in attending on the Breaking of Bread, which you know means the Holy Communion, and steadfast in attending upon the public Prayers. And a little later in the Acts,† we read that they came together on the Lord's day—every Lord's day, as it seems plain, to break Bread. Reserving this subject for the evening, I will now hasten on to the history of Christian Worship in the days when the Apostles were dead and gone, and the miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost were withdrawn from the Church.

It is well known to learned men that the early Church all over the world had its Liturgy,—its Book of Common Prayer. The Church was planted in and over nearly the whole known world, by the Apostles themselves; and we find that each Church so planted had a Liturgy of its own. Each Church, i.e., not each congregation, nor yet perhaps each diocese, but each province, each large section of

* Acts ii. 42.

† Acts xx. 7.

the Church. There have come down to us many ancient Liturgies or Prayer Books, that were used in those Churches ; but among these, learned men distinguish four *families* of Liturgies, each of which had evidently some one common origin. There was one for the Churches of which Jerusalem was the head ; one for the African Churches, of which Alexandria was the head ; one for the Italian Churches ; and one for the French Churches. These Liturgies, though differing in many particulars, yet all agreed in their main features. Then, again, each Diocese had its own Liturgy, which differed in some small trifles from those used in the neighbouring Dioceses ; for each Bishop was anciently considered to have the right to make such additions to his Liturgy as were needed for the edification of his own people, provided always that he made no substantial alterations. And the Church in England had its Liturgy, of course, as well as other Churches.

The Christian Religion was introduced into England at least as early as the Second Century, certainly within a hundred years of the death of Christ ; and the ancient Britons were all converted to Christianity. But several hundred years after, the Anglo-Saxons invaded and conquered England, and made it Pagan again.

I daresay most of you have heard the beautiful story told of Gregory, Bishop of Rome, how he found some fair English boys in the slave market at Rome, and, discovering that the English were Pagans, gave himself no rest until he sent a

zealous missionary, named Augustine, with a body of clergy, to convert them.

When Augustine came to preach the Gospel to them, he found to his surprise a Christian Church already there, in the mountains of Wales, with a Liturgy of its own. He, of course, brought with him the Roman Liturgy, but it could not, and did not entirely supplant the old English Prayer Book, though, no doubt, some of its rites were adopted. Then, when the Normans, at a later day, conquered England, they brought their own Prayer Book with them, and grafted on the English Liturgies some of their own peculiar usages. And so it came to pass that in England, just before the Reformation, there were, as we read in the Preface* to our Prayer Book, many Liturgies used, one in one Diocese, and another in another,—such as the Salisbury Liturgy, the Hereford, the Bangor, the Lincoln, etc.

Those Prayer Books were not in their original purity and beauty. No! In the course of ages, when unhappily corruptions in doctrine crept into the Church, those corruptions crept also into the Liturgies. The worship of the Virgin, the invocation of saints and angels, and many other superstitions, were gradually introduced into the Liturgies; those Liturgies remaining, in the Churches of Europe, in Latin, long after that language ceased to be understood by the people.

* I earnestly wish that every one would read very carefully over and over again the Preface to our Prayer Book. It contains a great deal of very valuable information.

Now, my brethren, you will understand from this just how matters stood in England before the Reformation. The blessed Bible was in Latin, and very few, even of the clergy, read it or knew anything about it. There were Prayer Books—probably six or seven different ones in England—all, however, agreeing in their main features,—agreeing with one another, I mean, and also, remember, with all other Prayer Books all over Christendom. But they were in a language which the people did not understand, and they were sadly corrupted and marred. There was a sore famine in the land ; a famine of the bread of life, and of the living waters of salvation.

Now mark how the Reformation in England proceeded. There was no violent revolution, but a calm and gradual *reformation and restoration*. It was not, remember, that the old Church was pulled down and a new one set up. The old Church remained where it was, but it awaked out of a sleep of ages, and *it reformed itself*. The bishops, priests, and deacons remained as before. Of course they continued not by reason of death, but they succeeded one another by ordination, just as before. The people were, as before, baptized, catechised, confirmed, given the holy communion, married, and buried. But now it was with a pure Scriptural Liturgy, a Prayer Book in their own mother tongue, one which was well called, what it emphatically is, the Book of *Common Prayer*, not the Priests' but the *People's* Prayer Book.

The way it was brought about was this. First,

the English Bible was set up in the Churches for the people to go and read it for themselves, in the year 1540, under Henry VIII. Next, in 1542, the House of Bishops, led by Cranmer, ordered that "every Sunday and holiday throughout the year the curate of every parish should, after the *Te Deum*, openly read to the people one chapter of the New Testament in English, and when the New Testament was read over, then to begin the Old." This was the first step; one chapter in English, everything else in Latin. Next, in 1544, two years after, Cranmer set forth the *Litany* in English, nearly the same as we have it now. The rest, or nearly the rest, of the services were translated into English, in King Henry's reign, but not for *public* but only for private use.

Next, after King Edward VI's accession, in 1548, an English *Communion* Service was set forth, which was to be used at the *end* of the Latin mass, and not yet in *place* of it; and at this time, too, the *cup* was restored to the people. But before the end of the year, the Bishops had the whole Prayer Book translated into English, and ready to present to the King and the Parliament, by whom it was sanctioned and adopted, as well as by the clergy in their Synod, and set forth by authority on June 7th, 1549. Thus, then, the English people had at length all their public services in their own mother tongue.

Now take notice, my brethren, that all this was done within nine years. It was but nine years from the first setting up of the English Bible to

the abolishing of Latin, and setting forth the whole Prayer Book in English substantially as we have it now.

But some persons may say, "It was done very hastily; nine years is a short space of time." I don't think so. Nine years, at a time when the whole world is awakened up to think, and study, and pray, and strive mightily for the truth—nine years of an age when men and women in hundreds are willing to die—and do die—sooner than give up the truth, is a long time, and at such a time rapid progress is made. But the revision of our English Prayer Book did not stop there, and this I wish you especially to mark and remember.

It was all in English; and the Popish party found fault enough with it, and thought it went a great deal too far in altering things, while, on the other hand, some thought it did not go far enough. So three years after, in 1552, it was resolved to go carefully over it and examine it, and revise and if necessary reform it again. This was done, and a good many alterations introduced, all of them to please those who wished to go as far as possible from Rome. Still the Prayer Book remained substantially the same, being, *in substance*, the Old English Prayer Book which the English Church always had. Many Churchmen, however, thought it materially injured by some things left out of it at this time; and it is remarkable that some changes were made in the Prayer Book then, to please that party which afterwards became the founder of dissent among us, which were rejected

at the next review, and were never approved of by any Synod of the Church of England since.

But to hasten on. The next year good King Edward VI. died, and Queen Mary succeeded, and with her Popery resumed its sway, and of course the English Prayer Book was cast out, and the Latin Mass restored, and all seemed lost. But God was only trying his people; the blood of the martyrs became the seed of the Church; and through the *persecutions* of Mary, Popery was rooted out of England for ever.

Mary reigned five years, and was succeeded by Elizabeth, who at once restored the English Prayer Book, not by her own mere authority, but in an orderly way, by acts of the Bishops and Clergy in their Synod, and the people in their Parliament. The Prayer Book was at this time again thoroughly and most carefully examined and revised, and a few alterations made. This was in the year 1560.

Elizabeth reigned upwards of forty years, and was succeeded by King James I. in 1603. He caused another revision of the Prayer Book to be made, at the request of the Puritan party, who were now becoming very strong in England, and demanded great alterations in both Church and State. They sought to have many ceremonies cast out of the Prayer Book, which they thought to be superstitious and Popish; and to please them a new revision was made, and a few alterations introduced. The Prayer Book so revised continued to be used during the reign of James and Charles I., about forty years.

Meantime the Puritan party was growing stronger, and more violent and unreasonable, until at last they broke out into open rebellion, and murdered their King, and overthrew the Church and the Prayer Book together. For fifteen years the voice of the glorious and time-honored Liturgy was no more heard in public. In cellars and garrets of private houses, little companies of English Churchmen, now loving their persecuted Prayer Book more than ever, met together by stealth to worship their fathers' Saviour and God in their fathers' Form of Sound Words. The clergy were, to the number of six, seven, or eight thousand, ejected from their cures, and their places filled in too many cases by rude, ignorant, conceited, fanatical men; and multitudes of them without any pretence even to ordination, which indeed the Independents, who were then in power, rejected altogether.

At the death of Cromwell the nation welcomed back their king with joy and exultation, and restored the Church and its Liturgy with no less gladness. An attempt, however, was made to restore unity to the Church, and a conference was held between the Bishops and the leading Dissenters, to see if they could agree upon terms of union. It was found to be impossible, unless the Bishops would give up all that they held most sacred in that rich inheritance which they had received from their fathers—the English Prayer Book. However it was again thoroughly and carefully revised, every objection of the Dissenters

to it examined, a few alterations were introduced, and it was thus finally brought to that exact form in which it has continued ever since, and in which we, my brethren, have it in our hands now. It was revised by a Committee of learned Divines. The alterations which they proposed were then sanctioned by the Bishops and Clergy in their Synod. The Prayer Book so revised was then ratified by the two Houses of Parliament and the King, and ordered to be used all over the kingdom by or before St. Bartholomew's day, 1662—one hundred and thirteen years after the Prayer Book was first revised by our Reformers and translated into English, and just two hundred years ago to-day.

But even this was not the last review of the English Prayer Book, and I am anxious you should remember and weigh well what I am now going to tell you. Twice again it has been reviewed since, and once revised and altered. When the American Colonies revolted from England, and became the United States, about seventy-five years ago, the English branch of the Church there met and revised the Prayer Book. And I think nothing is more wonderful than the result. The popular feeling against the Church was strong. The principles of most American Churchmen themselves were very low, and strongly tainted with dissent. In the Synod of the American Church, by which the Prayer Book was revised at that time, the laity were admitted to a share, and had an equal vote with the clergy and bishops put

together* in all questions. And yet, after all, scarcely a single alteration of any importance was introduced by them into their Prayer Book! Is not this a most striking testimony to the hold our Prayer Book has on the mind and heart of all our people? Most wonderful, too, it was, that when some of the clergy wished to introduce radical changes into the American Prayer Book, the *laity* interposed and refused to allow it to be altered!

But once more it has been reviewed by bishops, clergy, and laity of the English Church. In Australia, at the Cape of Good Hope, in New Zealand, and here in Canada, English bishops, clergy, and laity, have met in Synods. And what did they do? They first of all put on record a solemn declaration that they adopted for themselves, to use the language of our own Provincial Synod, "the Book of Common Prayer as a true and faithful declaration of the doctrines contained in Holy Scripture," and resolved to hand it on unaltered to their children after them. "We declare," they said, "our firm and unanimous resolution, in dependence on Divine aid, to preserve those doctrines and that form of government, and to transmit them to our posterity."

And now, my brethren, having thus discharged the duty laid on me of giving you a history of

* It must be remembered that the House of Bishops of the American Church had, at that time, no veto or negative upon the House of Clerical and Lay Delegates.

the Prayer Book, let me detain you a little longer, while I make two brief reflections on the narrative which you have heard.

And, 1st, it is a matter of the deepest and most heartfelt thankfulness that we are, through our Prayer Book and in the use of it, joined to and in communion with the whole Church of Christ in all the ages which have been before us. Because it is (as to its substance) no *new* book, but the *old* Prayer Book of the Church, turned into English and purged clean from all the novelties of false doctrine and superstitious worship which had been gradually introduced into it. The Bible it teaches us to read and *makes* us listen to, is the old Bible turned into our own English tongue. The Prayers are most of them the old prayers which have been used from very early times. The Litany is one of the oldest in the world, and certainly the most perfect. And especially that Office, which is the most venerable and sacred of all, the Office for the Holy Communion, is primitive and pure, and in using it faithfully we are of one heart and soul with God's true saints in every age. When Rome, then, and her followers, accuse us of abandoning the ancient faith and worship of the Catholic Church, and introducing novelties, we can and we always ought to say to them,—*We* have no novelties, no innovations; we have not abandoned but returned to and restored the true ancient Catholic faith and worship. For we continue steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine and fellow-

ship, and in the Breaking of Bread, and in the Prayers; not using even our own words, but the ancient time-honored words of the old Church in the English Bible, the English creeds, and the English prayers.—Surely, Brethren, this is a blessed, a most happy, and comfortable thought!

2. But there is another reflection, and with it I will conclude. And it is this: that the History of the Prayer Book, which I have now given you, shows most conclusively that there can be no remnants of darkness and superstition—no “rags of Popery,” as is sometimes said, in our English Prayer Book. You sometimes hear it said that the Prayer Book was compiled by our Reformers when their eyes were still somewhat blinded by the darkness out of which they had come, and when they were not yet able to look with boldness and clearness upon the full light of the Gospel. My brethren, you see that this is a mistake, and that this objection is altogether founded in ignorance. The Prayer Book was not compiled,* as it is now, in the days of the Reformation, but has been reviewed and revised and scrutinized, and its every word weighed again and again and again during more than one hundred—nearly one hundred and fifty years, before it assumed its present exact shape. More than that, it was reviewed and revised fully a hundred years later by the American

* I hope I have made it quite clear above that the Prayer Book was not *compiled* at the Reformation. It is in no proper sense of the word a *compilation*. It is the old Prayer Book of the English Church revised and translated into English, “the same Book,” as Cranmer said of it. “that had been used for nigh 1500 years in England.”

Church; and reviewed and adopted unaltered by the English Church of this very day throughout the Colonies of Great Britain. And remember, Brethren, that in all those revisions and alterations of the Prayer Book, it was not the clergy alone who acted; the laity always had their full share, in England, in the person of the Sovereign, and in the Parliament, and in the United States and the Colonies, having an equal voice with the bishops and clergy in the Synods themselves. The Prayer Book, then, whatever can or may be said against it, is the true voice, the true chosen faith, and the chosen worship of the English Church, of the bishops, the clergy, and the people, but emphatically of the *people*; it is the *People's Book*. It is true that outside the Church objections are still urged against it; against doctrines taught and practices required by it; but *not one* of those objections is new or modern; not one of them, I believe, is ever brought forward now which was not brought forward in the time of Cranmer himself, and at subsequent revisions of the Prayer Book. Let the people, then, remember this; and when anything is said against their Prayer Book which seems plausible to them, let them remember that the objection, if plausible, is nothing more; it has been examined and refuted by their forefathers in the faith times without number.

Thank God then, my brethren, for this inheritance; prize it, cherish it; examine it, study it,

store it away in your hearts. For when you understand, know, and believe, and love it, you are one in faith with all the faithful. When you love and pray its prayers, you are one in your devout communions with God, with all praying people in earth and in eternity.



BICENTENARY SERMON.

II.

"And they continued stedfastly in the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in Breaking of Bread, and in Prayers."—Acts ii. 42.

This morning, in obedience to the Resolution of the Synod, I gave you, Brethren, a short History of our Book of Common Prayer. That history proves conclusively, as I pointed out, that there are in our Prayer Book, on the one hand, no offensive novelties unknown to the Ancient Catholic Church in the early and pure ages; nor, on the other hand, any remnants of the superstitions and corruptions which crept into the Church in later times.

The Resolution of the Synod directs me to "preach upon the history and excellence of the Prayer Book." The plain unvarnished history of the Prayer Book is the best possible proof of its

excellence. That which has been from the beginning of the Christian Religion, which has approved itself to the wisdom and devotional feeling of all the best Christians in every age, must be excellent; and this is true of the substance of the Prayer Book. That which has been examined during the last three hundred years, over and over again with the greatest care, and corrected and perfected and approved from time to time, down to our own day, by the Bishops, the Clergy, and the People of the English Church, cannot but be excellent. What better guarantee of excellence can be imagined or wished than that furnished by this History?

One point remains. The Synod instructs me to speak to you upon *the Scriptural character* of the Book of Common Prayer, and to this I now proceed to address myself.

In doing so, I propose to take you rapidly through the Acts and Epistles, and point out some of the hints and traces which a careful examination of those parts of the New Testament discovers, of the existence, in the very earliest Christian times, of a full and complete organization of the Christian Church, and more particularly, of some such mode of conducting public worship as we now have.

I am not going to prove, remember, the lawfulness of a Form of Public Worship, for that no one denies; nor yet its expediency, for surely the use of such forms by Christians in every age sufficiently establishes it to be the general sense of men that

they are expedient. But what I wish to show is, that a regular orderly government of the Church, such as we have now, and a Liturgy with rites and ceremonies, were established earlier than many persons imagine.

In those first days of the Gospel, when the struggle of the Church was for life and death, when Christians were subject to almost constant persecution, when often they had to meet for the worship of their God and Saviour in "deserts and mountains and dens and caves of the earth,"—it is plain that the Church had not the facilities for organizing herself which she had afterwards, when Christ was acknowledged to have vanquished Paganism, and the world bowed down at His Church's feet.

But we must remember, on the other hand, that the first Christians were Jews. They were accustomed to the decent and well-regulated order, the strict church-government, the solemn ritual worship, the Forms of Prayer—the Liturgy, in fact, of the Jewish Church. And we must remember, also, that for about twelve years the preaching of the Gospel was confined to Judea.* Indeed, the Twelve Apostles, or most of them, seem to have remained at Jerusalem even many years later,† founding, building up, ordering and governing

* The authorized "preaching of the Gospel," I mean, by men commissioned by the Apostles. I suppose that "its sound went out into all the world" from the day of Pentecost onwards,—the Good News being carried back by the converted Jewish Pilgrims who "went up out of every nation under Heaven, to Jerusalem for to worship."

† Acts xv. 2, 4, 22, 23.

the Church of which they were the Twelve Foundation-stones. What better opportunity could the infant Church have had for attaining organization, order, stability,—for developing and perfecting ordinances,—and especially for minutely setting in order, for all time, all things pertaining to the solemnity, glory, and beauty of the worship of Almighty God? Calmly and seriously the Apostles set themselves to this great task, remaining in Jerusalem till it was complete.

The work entrusted by the Lord to His Apostles, we should never forget, was not simply the work of the conversion of individual souls. He sent them, indeed, to make disciples of all nations, to baptize and teach them one by one. But He sent them to preach “the Gospel of the *Kingdom*.” He gave them “the keys of the *Kingdom of Heaven*,” and power to admit into that kingdom and to exclude from it, and to rule and govern in it. He sent them to plant, not an idea but a *Church* in the world—a visible, organized Society, with laws and rules and officers—to admit men into that Church or Society or Kingdom, by baptism; and after they were admitted, to train them up in it as fellow members, by its holy discipline, into fitness for eternal glory. And that was what they set themselves to do, and what they did. And so in the ages that follow we find in the world—in every part of the world—yes, so early as the second century, we find throughout Europe and Asia and Northern Africa, and even in the British Islands, Christianity established. But what “Christianity”?

Not a multitude of individual believers, each one independent of the rest, believing and doing what he would. Much less do we find a multitude of small independent Christian sects and denominations. No, far from it. We find One *Kingdom* of Christ in the world, as He appointed and as He foretold it should be. We find a Church—one great organized visible Society—having everywhere the same rules and order and organization; the same threefold ministry of Bishops, Priests, and Deacons; the same two great Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper; the same ordinances, the same liturgy—or rather many liturgies all differing in some things, all agreeing in the main—the same Holy Scriptures; and, above all, the same creeds. That is what we find, and that we could not find except it was what the Apostles established.

Alas! we do not find it now—that noble Society, that One Body, everywhere one in faith and order, and love and peace, everywhere at unity with itself. And surely on such a day as this, when we are surveying the beauty and glory of our own inheritance, and rejoicing over it, we must ask: Is there no hope of the restoration of the visible unity on earth of the Kingdom of Christ?

My Brethren, if, humanly speaking, that hope exists, it is, I am deeply persuaded, to be sought for in the English Branch of the Catholic Church; in her history, in her position as the Church of the greatest of Empires, in her wonderful revival and expansion in our own day, but above all in

her Book of Common Prayer. For here is a common ground on which all who profess and call themselves Christians may meet—a ground tried to the uttermost and not found wanting,—Evangelical Truth and Apostolical Order,—a Book of Divine offices which are in substance as ancient and Catholic as the Church herself, purged from all the older corruptions, and free from all modern novelties and inventions. May we not hope and pray, Brethren, that it may yet please God to make our Church, with this Book in her hand, the Mediator among the divided families of Christendom? And while we long and yearn for that glorious time, let us not forget the responsibility that lies upon us, by living up to the privileges we possess, to show ourselves worthy of a share in bringing about so blessed a consummation.

Bearing in mind, then, that this work of building up a great Kingdom of truth and peace in the world—a great and well ordered Society—was the work entrusted to the Apostles, and which they set themselves to do, let us return to the New Testament, and examine it, and see if we cannot trace out something of the *plan and method* upon which the Apostles proceeded in organizing the Church. That the whole plan in all its particulars was not given them by the Lord Jesus Christ by word of mouth, but that it was gradually developed by the Holy Ghost, as the necessities of the Church pointed out that each part was required, seems to me plain from many particulars in the Acts of the Apostles. Thus (to take one example) we read there that the

appointment of Deacons did not take place for some time, and was first suggested by the need of some body of men to superintend the distributing of the alms to the poor. Nevertheless, even at the very beginning we find order, and a system, and I think, too, a Liturgy.*

1. The first feature of an organized Church which I shall name is *a fixed place of worship*. This is what we should, perhaps, least of all expect, and yet we discover very plain traces of it at the very beginning of the Gospel. In the first chapter of the Acts we have mention of "*the Upper Room*" where the disciples met for "prayer and supplication" day by day. This was, most probably, the very same "large upper room" † where the Last Supper was held; and again the same into which the Risen Saviour entered on the evening of the first Easter Day, and a second time after eight days.‡ We are led to conclude from the narrative that it was in the same room they were assembled on the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Ghost came down. We meet again with the mention of a large Upper Room used for public worship, in an important passage in the twentieth chapter of the Acts. "And upon the First Day of the week, when *the disciples came together to break bread*, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow.....And there were many lights *in the*

* For the matter of the rest of this Sermon, I am indebted to the Sixth Lecture of the late lamented Professor Blunt's admirable work on "The duties of the Parish Priest."

† St. Mark xiv. 15.

‡ St. John xx. 19, 26.

Upper Chamber where we were gathered together." That this was not any chance room, but a room set apart for that purpose only, is plain from those passages in the Epistles of St. Paul, where he sends salutations to one and another, "and to the Church in his house."* From these passages we confidently gather that in each city or place one or more houses were selected, and rooms in them set apart for the meetings of Christians for public worship, and especially for the celebration of the Holy Communion. And we are confirmed in this conclusion by that passage in which St. Paul says to the Corinthians reprovably, "What! have ye not *houses* to eat and to drink in, or despise ye *the Church of God*."† The *place*, therefore, where "the Church of God" met was not in any and every ordinary house.

2. Next, we find that there was a regular, orderly mode of conducting the public worship. The men were to be, for example, bare headed, and the women covered.‡ And this particular order St. Paul speaks of in connection with a body of rules of a similar kind, for he says, "Now I praise you, Brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the *ordinances* as I delivered them to you.§ These were *ordinances* for the decent conduct of public worship. And the same ordinances were observed in every Church, for St. Paul concludes his argument against women being bare headed in Church, by saying, "If any man

* Rom. xvi. 3; 1 Cor. xvi. 19; Philemon i. 2.

† 1 Cor. xi. 22.

‡ 1 Cor. xi. 4.

§ 1 Cor. xi. 1.

seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God."* The churches of God had all the same "customs."

3. Then, thirdly, we have hints of a *regular service*, a regular Liturgy, in which the minister and the congregation had each an appointed part. And here I will ask you to look at my text. "They continued steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine, and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in prayers." We have here mention of four things, in which the Christian converts continued steadfast. First, in the *doctrine* of the Apostles, that is, in attendance on their *teaching*, listening to them, learning the truth and being instructed in it, according to the command of Christ to His Apostles, that they were first to baptize believers in Him, and then proceed to *teach* them to observe all things that He had commanded them. 2nd. They continued steadfast in what is translated the *fellowship*. But the word is literally *communion*, and is the word *generally* used to express the act of giving alms for the relief of poor Christians. And here learned men take it to mean, and I think rightly, *contributing to the offertory*. They were steadfast in their contributions to the common fund for the relief of the poor and for all other Church purposes. This, remember, is exactly in agreement with St. Paul's directions to the Corinthians,† and which he tells them he had established in the neighbouring Churches of Galatia. "As I have given orders to

* 1 Cor. xi. 16.

† 1 Cor. xvi. 1, 2.

the Churches of Galatia, so also do ye. Upon the *first day of the week* let every one of you lay by him in store as God hath prospered him." Then 3rd, they continued steadfast in "the *Breaking of Bread*,"—constant and regular in receiving the Holy Communion every Lord's Day. And 4th, "steadfast in *prayers*," or rather "*the prayers*," as it is in the original. It is plain that the public prayers of the Church are meant; the well-known and regularly established worship.

Here, then, we find in the very earliest Christian Church this complete order of Lord's Day (if not daily, which is more probable) public worship. First, public teaching and preaching; secondly, the weekly offertory; thirdly, the weekly celebration of the Holy Communion; fourthly, a regular service of well-known Prayers.

Now for a more particular description of those Prayers. We turn to the first Epistle to Timothy, where St. Paul describes them. "I exhort, therefore, that first of all supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and for all that are in authority."* Here is a fourfold division of the public Prayers,—"*Supplications, Prayers, Intercessions, and Giving of Thanks*,"—a division which answers to the general features of all Liturgies now or formerly in use. We have then, I think, discovered plain traces of some sort of well-known set forms of Prayers—not one long prayer, but "*Supplications, Prayers, Intercessions, and Thanksgivings*,"

* 1 Tim. ii. 1, 2.

which seems to require a number of shorter prayers arranged under those different heads.

To proceed :

4. We find plain traces of a *Creed*, and as this is a point of great importance, I ask for special attention to it. You will see that St. Paul delivered to all his converts a creed,—that is, a short summary of the principal points which a Christian is bound to believe,—a Creed which they committed to memory, professed at baptism, and carefully kept ever after, as a rule of both faith and practice. St. Paul says to the Romans,* “God be thanked, that (though) ye were the servants of sin, ye have obeyed from the heart that *form of doctrine* which was delivered you;” or rather (as it is in the margin) “to which ye were delivered.” Here is a Form or System of Doctrine, professed by Christians as a rule of holy living, and that, too, at their baptism, as you will see by carefully examining the chapter; for the whole argument of the chapter turns upon this, that our *baptism* obliges us to holiness. To the same short summary of the faith, St. Paul seems plainly to allude again when he says, “Mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to THE DOCTRINE *which ye have learned;*” † but here it is referred to as a rule of *faith*, to guard them from being led wrong by false doctrines. And what else but this can be meant where he warns Timothy, “*Keep that which is committed to thy trust*, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science, falsely so

* Rom. vi. 17.

† Rom. xvi. 17.

called, which some professing have erred concerning the faith." * The phrase, "that which is committed to thy trust," is only one word in the original Greek, literally, "the deposit," and is evidently a Form of Doctrine, as it is to preserve Timothy from erring from the Faith. However, if we had any doubt as to what it was that was "committed to his trust," the doubt would be removed by a plainly corresponding exhortation in the second Epistle to Timothy, "Hold fast the *form of sound words* which thou hast heard of me." † To this Form of Sound Words St. Paul seems to refer when he exhorts the Hebrews to "hold fast the *Profession of their Faith without wavering*," ‡—the Profession, or rather Confession made, that is, when we were baptized, "washed in pure water," as the previous verse shows; and to the same when he says, "let us prophecy according to the *propagation of the Faith*,"—let our expositions of Scripture be in harmony with the Form of Doctrine which we received. And to pass by other passages, what are we to understand by the opening verses of the fifteenth chapter of 1st Corinthians, but a recital of some of the Articles of the Church's Creed? St. Paul, as the most effectual way of convicting the false teachers among the Corinthians of heresy in denying the resurrection of the body, calmly recites the Articles of the Creed until he comes to this very doctrine. "Moreover, Brethren, I declare unto you *the Gospel* which I preached unto you, which also ye received, and wherein ye stand;

* 1 Tim. vi. 20, 21.

† 2 Tim. i. 13.

‡ Heb. x. 23.

by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory (or "hold fast,"—margin) what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins..... and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures." These are the Articles, in regular order, so far as they go, of the Creed of the Church to this very day.

It seems plain, then, that each Church had a Creed, a "Form of Sound Words," which was solemnly "delivered to them," as a sacred trust, by the Apostles, and which they were to "keep in memory," and "hold fast."

5. It would not be necessary to say, except to make my statement complete, that there were *Ministers* in this early Church; that is, men set apart by a visible ordination and with an authoritative commission, for the performance of holy functions, and distinct from the body of Christians in general. There were, I need scarcely say, three orders of ministers; 1st, Apostles, whom we now call Bishops; 2nd, Elders, or Presbyters, who were also called Bishops in those days; and 3rd, Deacons. They were chosen after an examination into their purity of life, aptness to teach, and general fitness for the office. They were ordained, after solemn public fasting and prayer, by the laying on of the hands of Apostles and their successors in office. This is all too plainly written in the Acts and Epistles to need, at least to you, Brethren, any argument. So I pass on to notice

6. That so orderly were the arrangements of this primitive Church, that if a member, whether clergyman or layman, travelled to a distant country, he always carried with him, from his own Church to the Church in his new home, "letters commendatory,"—that is, letters certifying that he was a Christian, testifying to his Christian character, and especially that he was admissible to the Holy Communion. "Need we," says St. Paul to the Corinthians,* in allusion to this custom, "need we, as some others, epistles of commendation to you, or letters of commendation from you?" We have an actual instance of the use of such letters, recorded in Acts xviii. ; when Apollos was about to pass from Ephesus to Achaia, "the Brethren of Ephesus," we read, "wrote exhorting the disciples to receive him," and he was at once admitted as a Christian minister at Corinth. So again, when a collection was being made at Corinth for the poor Christians of Judea, St. Paul undertook to send it to Jerusalem, by such persons, says he, "as ye approve *by your letters*."† But the Epistle of St. Paul to Philemon is itself such a letter, recommending to Philemon his runaway servant or slave, Onesimus, who was now become a Christian.

7. And the last point which I shall mention is *the institution of Synods or Councils*, for the resolution of difficult questions. The Council held at Jerusalem to settle the question of circumcision, as related in the fifteenth chapter of the Acts, was

* 2 Cor. iii. 1.

† 1 Cor. xvi. 3.

the model after which all Synods or Church Councils have been conducted ever since. St. James, as the Bishop of Jerusalem, which was the Mother Church, presided; and after much debate they arrived at a unanimous decision. That decision was registered in due form, and sent to the Church in which the question had arisen, and afterwards it was delivered to be kept throughout the cities, as "an ordinance of the Apostles and Elders which were at Jerusalem."

Here, then, I pause; but before concluding let me briefly sum up for you the traces which we have found in the Acts and Epistles of the structure and government of the Primitive Church. We have seen that the Lord's Day was observed, and that every Lord's Day, at least, there was solemn public worship, with administration of the Holy Communion, in places set apart for that purpose only. Collections were then also made in Church for the relief of the poor, the support of the Clergy, and other Church purposes. There were Clergy of three orders chosen by those in authority, and set apart by the laying on of hands for holy offices, as God's ministers, and stewards of His mysteries and pastors of the people. There was a regular Liturgy of some sort—forms of prayer divided into regular portions, offered up in Church by the Clergy, and to which St. Paul tells us the People said *Amen*.* There was a Creed, professed at Baptism, learnt by heart, and kept carefully by every Christian, and most probably repeated in

* 1 Cor. xiv. 16,

public worship. And all things in public worship were done according to rules laid down by the Apostles; among which were such as that men should be uncovered and women veiled, and that women should keep silence in the Church. There were regular rules admitting strangers from one Church to another by commendatory letters. And (which I did not mention before)* there was a discipline by which unfaithful Christians were put out from the communion of their Brethren, and re-admitted on their repentance.

The Primitive Church, then, was One regular organized Body from the very beginning. Its operations were carried on, not in a desultory chance way, but with all the energy which unity and order and organization always give. And I appeal to you with confidence, my Brethren, if the Church, of which I have now been tracing out for you the main features in Holy Scriptures, is not the same Church substantially in which we have the happiness to find our place to-day? Is it not the same Church that we find in our Prayer Book? Do not the Bible and Prayer Book mutually interpret each other? Is not the Prayer Book, then, in the highest and best sense, *Scriptural*? In the New Testament we have peeping out everywhere the growing features of the infant Church. In the Prayer Book we have the same Church full-grown. In the Prayer Book we have

* I have said nothing of the Orders of Deaconesses (Rom. xvi. 1; 1 Tim. 11), and Widows (1 Tim. v. 9—12).

"the Apostles doctrine" and "Form of Sound Words" in the Creeds, the Apostolic Weekly Offertory, the Breaking of Bread, and "*the Prayers*,"—the Supplications, Prayers, Intercessions, and Thanksgivings. Well may they be called "*the Prayers*," for they are truly *the* old Prayers of the Church; how old we do not know, for the origin of the most of them is lost in the distance of time. "*The Prayers*," the matchless prayers, which are not of the earth, earthy, but heavenly; meet at once for the lips of sin-stained but penitent men, and for the ears of the Awful Holiness and Majesty of God.

Again, then, I say, let us thank God who has given and preserved to our use that priceless Book of Common Prayer. Let us begin to be ashamed of our ignorance of it, and our coldness and indifference to it; and especially that we ever listened with patience and calmness while it was reviled and traduced by ignorant and unreasonable men. Let us study it that we may be able to commend its excellence and beauty to others, as well as by its means to purify and elevate our own hearts. Never let our lips be closed when it is our part to join in it in this House, nor our hearts cold and wandering when God and His dear Son are here to accept and answer its "prayers and praises, intercessions and giving of thanks." But let us remember that this House is the *House* of Prayer, as our Liturgy is the *Book* of Prayer, and as God is the *Hearer* of Prayer. For *Prayer* is

communion with God here, and that is what we have on earth most like heaven. God is now ever near us and His eye upon us; blessed are they who find it *good* to draw near to Him in the holy worship of His House. For to such, when the veil that hides Him from our view falls away, and they stand before Him face to face—*that* will be Heaven itself.

